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Michigan House Appropriations Committee

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Greetings, Representative Laura Cox and other members of this committee. Representative Yousef Rahbi, thank you for your work on behalf of the citizens of the Ann Arbor area. I live in Scio Township. I am here this morning to give **testimony on SB 897, the proposed work requirement plan for Medicaid coverage.**

I appreciate this opportunity to address the House Appropriations Committee since you are responsible for creating Michigan's annual state budget, looking after the Michigan's money economy.

I'd like to begin my testimony with a little-known truth. There are three economies in Michigan. By far, the largest of these is the Earth's economy wherein Earth's ecosystems provide countless services that humanity benefits from, services like creating clean water and air, services like turning the topsoil through the actions of the earthworms and other creatures, services like maintaining the conditions conducive to supporting life, human and otherwise. We could be a lot more grateful.

The second largest economy in Michigan and in worldwide human communities we could call the Care economy. It's all the work that is done

without direct compensation. Things like parenting and grandparenting, caring for the sick and elderly, homeschooling children and volunteering all fit into the description of this vast exchange of human energy for something other than money. This is the primary social safety net. We could be a lot more grateful.

The last and by far the smallest economy on Earth is the Money economy where goods and services are purchased. In this economy, the value of a person's life is too often determined by how much money they have to spend. It doesn't matter how much good they bring to their community. Those things don't count unless they are commodified. While this is the economy through which we provide a home, eat most of our food, and acquire most of our clothing, transportation, etc, it's also true that in this economy, sickness, divorce, war, prisons and tragedies can be viewed as contributing to the bottom line somewhere and are therefore contributing to "the economy." I hope you can see what doesn't count—it's all the things I mentioned that are part of the Care economy.

I am 62 years old and a grandmother of two boys ages 3 and 7. I am the caregiver for my grandsons anytime their parents are away, mostly at their jobs. This is a time-honored contribution that I willingly give to my family. I say time-honored because in the course of human life on this Earth, most children have been tended to by their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other members of their family rather than in daycare. Through my care, my grandsons know that they matter, that they are safe and that they will have experiences that only a grandparent can provide.

Recently, I told them the story of when their great-grandpa, my father, killed a polar bear in self-defense in Greenland as a young man. This story was told while they were eating a nutritious after-school snack. The younger of the two, had taken his nap on my bed a few hours earlier, as he loves to do. Before he fell asleep, we continued our tradition of the latest installment of a series of stories about "Little Squirrel," a fictitious squirrel who has very squirrel-like adventures. I am making these stories up every time. Through these stories, my grandson is learning about the forest and the animals and plants that can be found there. My first grade grandson does his homework with me. We go through each of the arithmetic problems or writing assignments while he is half on his seat and half leaning into my lap. It's cozy that way. Many evenings, I get dinner going before my son gets home from work. Then I pack my house slippers and head for my own home.

The hours I give my family vary according to the work schedules of the parents of these two beautiful children. Until last month, I was providing childcare 29 hours a week. This month, as my son took a part time job, I am caring for the boys 15 hours a week plus any other time both parents are away. This will change again when the older boy is out of school for summer vacation.

I appreciate how flexible I can be in adjusting to the changing needs of my family. I cannot help my son and daughter-in-law with their college debt by paying it off with dollars, but I can help them have more of their own money to pay it down by keeping their childcare costs to a minimum. And I provide care for these children far beyond what a daycare situation could offer.

Additionally, I have given countless hours as a volunteer in my community. I have also tended to the sick and dying in my family and in my community. Just this past Sunday, I spent five and a half hours with a friend who is clinically depressed in her home. I am on government assistance for my healthcare coverage only, but I believe that I am more than compensating by contributing what I do in my family and in my community.

I have been a grateful Medicaid recipient for these past few years. If you were to ask me to get a paid job and leave off caring for my grandsons, tending to the needs of others and doing my volunteer work, I would choose to go without health insurance. I may seem poor to you, but my life feels rich to me.

Beyond my story, I hope you stop to consider that when you both require individual health care coverage and also require a paid work commitment to receive Medicaid, you will leave many children stranded in unsafe conditions while their very-low income parents or caregivers scramble to find a job, any job, to keep their coverage while leaving the children untended. This bill doesn't consider the childcare needs of children ages 7-12 as if they would all be able to take care of themselves when school is not in session. This bill would rob the sick of their caregivers. This bill will isolate the elderly in the loneliness of their homes when their neighbors are scrambling to fill a work requirement rather than coming for a visit. Sometimes people are poor because they are answering the human needs of caring attention and service for those who need them.

When Senator Shirkey was asked about people like me who could lose health care, he told reporters the social safety net “by definition, has a lot of holes in it.” That is taking a metaphor for the shared value we have for caring for others and using the metaphor to justify the ways this bill would create gaping holes in our social safety net making it much more difficult for Michigan’s family members and community members to care for one another. Shouldn’t our government work to support our shared value for caring for one another?

Senator Shirkey went on to say, “The best safety net ever invented by God is family, but I’m not sure that government is supposed to supplement that process.” Going back to what I was saying about the Care economy in the beginning of my testimony, it is this hidden economy, one based on the exchange of love, time, physical energy and compassion, that makes up for what the government cannot, and perhaps will not, do to ensure that everyone who needs care gets it. It is actually the Caring economy that is doing the supplementing. Always has and, hopefully, always will. It would be a terribly shortsighted mistake to let this bill undermine that important contribution to our society.

Thank you for listening.

